



How States Are Rethinking and Redefining Student Technology Use in Schools

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Over the last several years, student technology use has become a growing focus of education policy. State conversations have often centered on classroom distractions and student access to personal devices, but they also include concerns about student well-being, social media use, instructional screen time, digital literacy and online safety. As a result, policymakers have introduced and enacted a range of proposals that reflect the many ways technology now shapes the school environment.

These conversations are unfolding against a backdrop of near-universal access to digital technology among young people. Pew Research Center [reported](#) in 2024 that 95% of teens had access to a smartphone and 46% said they were online “almost constantly.” At the same time, policymakers, educators and families are grappling with questions about how technology may influence student learning, engagement and well-being.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s 2023 [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), 40% of high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and nearly 29% reported poor mental health. Three-quarters of students reported frequent social media use, which was associated with a higher prevalence of being bullied, feelings of sadness and hopelessness and suicide risk. According to [Pew Research Center](#), these concerns are reflected among parents and guardians as well, with 55% reporting they are extremely or very concerned about teen mental health today.

Researchers continue to study the relationship between technology use, social media, screen time and student well-being and outcomes. While findings remain mixed, the evidence base continues to evolve; educators have also reported concerns about classroom distractions and student engagement. Pew found that 72% of high school teachers said cell phone distraction is a major problem in the classroom.

In response, state policymakers have increasingly explored policies addressing technology use in schools. Education Commission of the States has identified **more than 40 states** with state-level policies addressing cell phones in schools. Policy activity also addresses social media access, instructional screen time, school-issued devices, digital literacy and online safety.

This range of policies suggests that state leaders are approaching technology use in schools as a broader policy issue rather than solely a question of cell phone access. As states continue to act in this area, a key consideration is how policies can balance efforts to reduce distractions and address concerns about student well-being while preserving the educational benefits technology can provide.

The [research](#) base on the effects of school cell phone restrictions continues to develop. Some [studies](#) suggest mobile devices can distract from learning, while other emerging [research](#) finds mixed or limited effects on academic achievement, attendance or student well-being. As states continue to explore policy options, implementation and enforcement and local context may play important roles in shaping outcomes.

Unless otherwise noted, the state examples discussed below refer to enacted legislation, adopted budgets or executive orders.

States are responding in different ways. Some have adopted statewide restrictions, while others have directed districts to develop local policies. At the same time, more policymakers are also considering related issues such as social media access, instructional screen time, digital literacy and implementation supports.

The examples below illustrate the range of approaches states are using to address student technology use in schools.

Which Devices Are States Focusing On?

States use various terms to describe personal device restrictions. State definitions can be narrow, including only cell phones, or expansive, including items like smartwatches, personal laptop computers, tablets, pagers, gaming devices or emerging technologies. Because terminology and scope vary across states, this snapshot uses the language in state policy when discussing specific state examples. When discussing broader trends and themes, we generally use the term “cell phone restrictions” or “personal device restrictions.”

State Approaches to Personal Device Restrictions

States have broadly supported policies regarding cell phones in schools. State approaches include bell-to-bell restrictions, instructional-time limits, model policies, storage expectations, reporting requirements, task forces and implementation guidance.

Bell-to-Bell Restrictions

Bell-to-bell bans prohibit students from using phones at any time during the school day, from the first bell in the morning to the final dismissal bell.



Indiana's [S.B. 78](#) (2026) expanded device use restrictions from “instructional time” to “school day,” which is defined as the entire time a student is present on school property during a student’s instructional day.



Rhode Island's [H.B. 5598](#) (2025) requires each public school to have a policy that prohibits physical access to a personal electronic device by students during the school day.

Instructional Time Restrictions

Instructional time restrictions are policies that prohibit students from using their cell phones during classroom instruction. These policies may allow students to use their phones during recess, passing periods and lunch.



Michigan's [H.B. 4141](#) (2026) requires the board of a school district or board of directors of a public school academy to implement a wireless communications device policy that prohibits students from using a wireless communications device on school grounds during instructional time. There are provisions to narrow the scope of the restrictions, including medically necessary devices, school-issued tablets and laptops, devices designated by the district to be used for instructional purposes, and devices used for special education programming among others.



Tennessee's [H.B. 932/S.B. 897](#) (2025) requires each local board of education and public charter school governing body to adopt and implement a wireless communication device policy that prohibits a student from using a wireless communication device during instructional time.

Local Discretion

Some states require that local education agencies establish policies. However, they do not specify what those policies should be, and, in some cases, do not require any restrictions.



Colorado's [H.B. 25-1135](#) (2025) requires local education agencies and district charter schools to adopt, implement and post possession and use policies for cell phones during the school day on their website. The bill allows these entities to consider options including limiting cell phone possession during the school day, considering prohibitions and exceptions specific to grade bands, considering evidence-based research and resources in developing a cell phone policy, and considering issues related to media literacy and social-and-emotional learning.



Washington's [S.B. 5346](#) (2026) allows school district boards of directors to adopt policies and procedures that limit students' possession and use of mobile devices. School district boards of directors are encouraged to review recommendations of best practice strategies provided by the office of the superintendent of public education.

Exceptions and Accommodations

As states adopt more restrictive school cell phone policies, the design of policy exceptions has emerged as an important policy consideration. Policymakers have sought to balance limits on student device use with the need to ensure access for health, safety, accessibility and instructional purposes. Some states go further by naming additional circumstances, such as translation services, student caregiving responsibilities, emergency use or educational use authorized by school staff.



Arizona's [H.B. 2484](#) (Enacted, 2025) requires schools to adopt policies limiting student internet access and use of personal devices during the school day. The policies must allow device use for teacher-directed educational purposes, emergencies and student medical conditions, and must include procedures for parents and students to contact each other during the school day.

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(Exceptions and Accommodations cont.)



New York's [FY 2026](#) enacted budget established a statewide phone-free schools [policy](#) requiring bell-to-bell restrictions on internet-enabled devices. The law requires schools to develop policies that include parent contact methods and annual enforcement reporting intended to reduce inequitable discipline. Exceptions include medical needs, individualized education programs, translation or language access needs, and parental contact. The law excludes non-internet-enabled cellphones and school-provided internet-enabled devices used for educational purposes.

State Support and Accountability

Some states are addressing how cell phone policies are implemented, monitored and supported through three main types of policies:

- 1| State-issued model policies and toolkits give districts common definitions, sample policy language and implementation resources.
- 2| Funding support helps districts pay for storage solutions or the ability to use state aid to ensure proper implementation.
- 3| Transparency and compliance provisions require public posting and annual reporting to monitor how local policies are carried out.

State Guidance and Implementation Tools



Ohio's [H.B. 250](#) (2024) requires the department of education and workforce to publish a model policy governing student cell phone use. The state's [model policy](#) prohibits student cell phone use during the school day, identifies acceptable storage options and includes language on progressive discipline. Districts are not required to adopt the model policy verbatim, but the resource provides a common template for local implementation.



Oregon's [Executive Order 25-09](#) (2025) requires Oregon school districts to adopt policies prohibiting student use of personal electronic devices during the school day and directs the Oregon Department of Education to support implementation. The department created a [toolkit](#) hub with guidance, frequently asked questions and resources for educators, administrators, families and students.

Fiscal Supports



Texas' [H.B. 1481](#) (2025) requires school districts to adopt and implement policies prohibiting student use of personal communication devices on school property during the school day. To support implementation, the Texas Education Agency allocated \$20 million in state grant funding to help school systems purchase secure storage solutions and implement the infrastructure necessary to enforce the ban. Allowable uses include procurement services, installation or support of secure storage systems, as well as storage pouches, cabinets, lockers or other containment devices.



Pennsylvania's [S.B. 700](#) (2024) amended the School Safety and Security Grant Fund program to allow schools with cell phone policies that prohibit the use of phones during the school day the ability to purchase lockable cell phone bags.

Transparency and Compliance



Arkansas' [Act 122](#) (2025) requires school districts to establish a written policy and exemptions concerning student possession and use of personal electronic devices during the school day. Districts must submit their policies and exemptions to the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education for review and approval. The division is also directed to write rules governing the compliance monitoring process and establish the process for policy approval. If a district or charter school fails to adopt or enforce the required policy, as determined by the division, it must be cited for a violation of the Standards for Accreditation of Arkansas Public Schools and School Districts. Districts must publish their device policies on their websites before the first day of each school year.



North Dakota's [H.B. 1160](#) (2025) requires school districts to adopt policies restricting student use of personal electronic devices during the school day, including requirements that devices be off, stowed and inaccessible. The law requires districts to collect annual data on student behavior, mental health, disciplinary incidents, attendance and academic performance, and directed the superintendent of public instruction to establish a uniform reporting system by July 1, 2026.

Social Media, Screen Time and School-Issued Technology

As states consider restrictions on student cell phone use, some policymakers are also looking more broadly at the role of screens, social media and school-issued technology during the school day. Many state policies are going beyond restricting students from possessing a device and focusing on how digital tools are used during the school day, especially for younger students. State approaches in this area generally fall into three categories:

- 1| Instructional screen use and school-issued technology;
- 2| Social media access and digital literacy;
- 3| Task forces.

Instructional Screen Use and School-Issued Technology



Iowa's [H.F. 2676](#) (2026) limits digital instruction for students in kindergarten through fifth grade to no more than 60 minutes per school day. The law also requires districts to complete a technology adoption checklist before adopting or renewing one-to-one device programs. The department of education is required to convene a working group on the impact of school-provided technology on cognitive function and academic performance in grades six-12.



Utah's [H.B. 273](#) (2026) requires the state board to create model policies on balanced classroom technology use and include grade-level frameworks for local practice. For kindergarten through third grade, the framework prohibits classroom screen time except for computer science standards and assessment, prohibits a required ratio of one electronic device to one student, emphasizes hands-on learning exercises and prohibits homework requiring internet. The law stipulates that, for students in middle and high school, instructional technology must be balanced with instruction through teacher-led, print-based and analog methods.

Social Media Access, Safety and Digital Literacy



Alabama's [H.B. 166](#) (2025) requires students to complete a social media safety course prior to entering the eighth grade. The course must cover the benefits and risks of social media, safe practices for using it and how to report suspicious behavior.



Colorado's [H.B. 24-1136](#) (2024), the Healthier Social Media Use by Youth Act, requires the department of education to create and maintain a resource bank of evidence-based and research-based materials on the mental and physical health impacts of youth social media use, internet safety and cybersecurity. The materials may be used in elementary and secondary schools and are intended to support educators, students, families and community providers.



Tennessee's [H.B. 825](#) (2026) directs the department of education to develop guidance for instructing grades six-12 on social media and internet safety. The guidance must address time management and healthy behaviors on social media, mental health effects, online manipulation, permanence of online sharing, cyberbullying and other harmful effects. The bill also requires schools to prohibit students from accessing social media through school-provided internet access, except when expressly authorized by a teacher for educational purposes.



North Carolina's [H.B. 959](#) (2025) requires local boards of education to adopt a safety internet policy that includes limiting access to only age-appropriate subject matter and materials, protecting student safety and security in email and chat rooms, prohibiting unauthorized access to student data, preventing student access to website and software that do not protect student information and prohibiting student access to social media platforms, except for educational purposes. The bill also requires a course of study with instruction on social media and its effects on health — including social, emotional and physical effects — to be offered to students once in elementary school and middle school and twice in high school.

Task Forces



The **Kansas** State Board of Education created the [Blue Ribbon Task Force](#) (2024) on Student Screen Time to develop recommendations on personal devices in schools, screen time and mental health and parental oversight of district-owned devices. The task force recommends regular screen breaks, digital citizenship education and stronger parental oversight of district-owned devices. It also recommends that districts allow families to set stricter controls on school-issued devices and preserve a balance between digital and non-digital learning.



Maine's [H.P. 1376](#) (2026) directs the Maine Education Policy Research Institute to survey educators across all 16 counties on classroom technology use, school-issued devices and related safety policies. The survey must address instructional time spent on school-issued devices, safeguards such as screen time settings and social media blocking, policies on generative artificial intelligence and unlicensed online tools, compliance measures, student privacy and instances of students bypassing internet restrictions. The institute must submit a report to the legislature with recommendations and suggested legislation.

Takeaways for Policymakers

State policies addressing student technology use continue to evolve. While many early efforts focused primarily on cell phone restrictions, recent legislation suggests policymakers are increasingly considering technology use more broadly.

State approaches vary considerably. Some states have established statewide requirements, while others emphasize local decision-making. This variation reflects differing views about the appropriate balance between statewide consistency and local flexibility, as well as differences in local capacity and community priorities.

Implementation remains a central consideration. Many recent policies address questions related to enforcement, parent communication, student accommodations, funding and accountability. Several states have also paired restrictions with guidance, reporting requirements or implementation supports intended to help districts carry out new expectations.

At the same time, policymakers are starting to examine how personal devices fit within a larger ecosystem of educational technology. State activity related to social media, instructional screen time, digital literacy and school-issued

devices suggests a growing interest in understanding how technology can support learning while minimizing potential challenges.

As states continue to navigate questions about technology in schools, policymakers may focus on how device restrictions, instructional technology, digital literacy and student well-being policies work together to support learning. Continued evaluation and data collection may help states better understand how these policies affect students, educators and school communities over time.

Related Resources

- [How States Are Evolving Cell Phone Policies in Schools](#)
- [AI in Education Policy - Moving at the Speed of Change](#)



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